

From Sherman Kent's Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy

Intelligence is the knowledge which ^{our} ~~our~~ highly placed
civilians and military men must have to safeguard the national
welfare. --p. vii

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Reflections on Current Intelligence

It is now 26 years since the practice of current intelligence for top level officials began in the postwar United States. Though there has been an evolution in the art in this period of time, the similarities of form and subject matter are more striking than the differences. Throughout this quarter of a century, the aim has been to give as straightforward an analytical account as possible of the main foreign developments affecting the US. The story began in January 1946, when President Truman asked the new Central Intelligence Group, soon to be renamed the Central Intelligence Agency, to provide him with a daily intelligence summary. He said he had many reports coming to him from different sources, but he needed one compilation that would draw together and evaluate the most important intelligence.

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The CIG responded with the Daily Summary under the editorship of [REDACTED] The CIA daily, called the Central Intelligence Bulletin for the past 14 years, has continued in an unbroken line down to the present, though

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it has been a product of different offices in the Agency. Since 1951 it has been produced by the Office of Current Intelligence, with the regular collaboration of the Office of Economic Research, and, in recent years, the Office of Strategic Research. Soon after its inception, the daily was joined by a current intelligence weekly and current intelligence memoranda, which have remained staple products of the profession.

A Matter of Definition

President Truman did not specify what he meant by "important intelligence." It was left to the CIG to make its own judgment of importance, and to decide what intelligence was. CIG's course was not to adopt a definition of intelligence and proceed in conformity with it, but to steer largely by instinct informed by the experience its members had gained in the intelligence field during World War II. Later on, newcomers who had not had this experience sought a precise definition, thereby opening up a discussion which has been carried on sporadically, but without any great intensity, to this day. There is plenty of room for argument and it is not uncommon to hear someone disparage a piece of information by saying, "That isn't intelligence!" If pressed, however, he would probably not be able to say what intelligence is.

Perhaps matters would be clearer if we recognized the difference between raw reports and finished intelligence.

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Much raw reporting--including a large part of the latest and most vital information to government officials--is obviously public. The reports have been gathered and disseminated by the press, radio, and television of various countries.

Unavoidably, most of the "big events" of the world become known first through the public media, though some of the events may have been foreshadowed by confidential reports. The fact that the US government goes to some pains and expense to scan the foreign press and monitor radio broadcasts and telecasts does not nullify the public character of this information.

On the other hand, representatives of the US government investigate many situations and produce many reports for the government's exclusive use. Because they are not to be made public, these field reports rate as intelligence. Usually they will be categorized as "raw intelligence," not because they are badly constructed but because they have not been integrated with other information in Washington. In this group are ambassadors' analyses of foreign political situations, attache reports of weapons and troop sightings, and observations that travellers make confidentially to the government. Higher on the scale of secrecy are clandestine agent reports, intercepted communications, and overhead imagery. In sum, raw reports fall into two classes, information and intelligence.

Of course, raw reports--notably press items--go directly to top officials in their pristine state. It is the function of the intelligence community, however, to clothe raw reports

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of either the public or privileged kind with other relevant information and interpretations so that the reports will be more meaningful to the policymakers and, particularly, will not be misleading. This function devolves upon the analysts.

Raw intelligence and finished intelligence can deal with political, economic, sociological or military subjects; they can concern friend, foe, or neutral, good news or bad, danger or opportunity. Looking at the record of what CIA has been producing over the years, we derive an ostensive definition of intelligence that is quite broad, and has been consistently so. The only characteristics common to all the intelligence reports received and published over the past quarter of a century are that they convey foreign information--i.e., they concern foreign countries, persons, and organizations--and they have been written by US officials.

In other words, intelligence is official information on foreign developments and situations. A finished report may be factually based on material from the public media and, even as interpreted, differ little from what is known by the man in the street, or it may have been acquired expensively by elaborate collection methods and constitute sensitive information known to only a few. Whatever its subject matter, it ought to be more reliable than non-official writing since it can draw not only on public information but on a variety of sources and background material exclusive to the government.

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We have been discussing intelligence in general. A word is in order on the distinctiveness of current intelligence. The National Security Council in NSCID No. 3 of 13 January 1948 laid down that current intelligence is "that spot information or intelligence of all types and forms of immediate interest and value to operating or policy staffs, which is used by them usually without the delays incident to complete evaluation or interpretation." In simpler terms, we could say that current intelligence deals with current foreign events and is produced promptly. The events in question may or may not be subjected to more thorough analysis later on.

Analysis

And, by the way, what is analysis? It is worth being as clear as possible on this point since anyone in the profession frequently hears comments like "This article is deeply analytical," "there ought to be more analysis in this publication," or "He is a first-class analyst." What is this great thing toward which we strive?

Webster says analysis is the "separation of anything into constituent parts or elements: also an examination of anything to distinguish its component parts or elements, separately or in relation to the whole."

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If Brezhnev gives a long speech, no doubt OCI will analyze it by distinguishing its component parts, telling the reader how much is devoted to foreign and how much to domestic affairs, and what topics are dealt with. But in the connotation that "analysis" has acquired in intelligence and the government, as well as in journalism, the word means more than simply dissecting a subject and laying its parts out on the table. It means something closer to explanation or interpretation. That is, the analyst contributes something positive to an understanding of the development.

Here are some of the more obvious possibilities for the analyst to make a positive contribution to the hard news he has to report:

He can put himself in the reader's position and try to answer the reader's natural questions;

He can provide related facts and background information;

He can explain the significance of the event, clarifying why it is important;

He can illuminate the motives and objectives of those involved;

He can explain why the development occurred, describing the forces at work and their interaction;

He can indicate if the development fits into a trend.

He can be premonitory and discuss the possible and probable consequences of the development-- what its impact will be on the people and the country involved, and on the US.

Crises, Threats, and Favorable Developments

From the beginning of the Daily Summary, current intelligence has logically, instinctively, and unavoidably focused on foreign developments of greatest significance to the US. Its first concern has been with events having an immediate impact on this country and calling for policy decisions. The hot issues--the crises--demand treatment. Prime examples of "must" coverage are wars. Since OCI was formed, the two wars in which the US has been involved have regularly been given prominent coverage in the regular daily. They have also called forth special dailies of their own. Sometimes war reports are eclipsed by pressure tactics by our antagonists, such as the various Soviet squeeze plays on Berlin and the attempt to plant missiles in Cuba. Developments regarding our antagonists' military capabilities, and, of course, what we can divine of their intentions, are covered conscientiously. All these are matters directly affecting US security.

One of the main purposes of the Bulletin is to guard official Washington against "surprises," particularly of the unpleasant variety. When the Bulletin fails, as it has occasionally, there is a post-mortem to determine the reasons.

Crises do not arise solely over issues of direct security significance; there are crises in diplomatic and economic relations between the US and its allies, and between other countries, with repercussions on the US. Moreover, intelligence deals as much with non-critical situations as with crises. It is quite possible that the most important intelligence is non-critical in nature, even if crisis reporting tends to hog attention. When the dam has broken, officials tend to be caught up by events; their capability of control is limited. On the other hand, if they can spot trouble coming in the future, they can plan carefully to meet, and perhaps, preclude it. It is this kind of "look ahead" that intelligence should provide.

Officials responsible for the conduct of foreign and defense policy cannot be adequately served only by information of a defensive nature, whether it concerns crises or future problems. For a full understanding of situations, they need to be informed of developments favorable to US interests and of opportunities for the US to promote its objectives. This is an important side of intelligence.

The Wide US Interest

In general, intelligence reporting must cover all countries and situations where there is a US interest. This is not in fact a restrictive prescription. Although it varies enormously in degree, there is a US interest in every country in the world. This follows from our desire

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to maintain stability, to counter the extension of our antagonists' influence, and to safeguard our economic interests.

The developments and situations that each country regards as most important to itself--usually its current major issues--are likely to have at least a potential impact on the country's political stability, economic and social welfare, defensive capabilities, or foreign policy. Consequently these issues must always be examined as possibly reportable subjects. Whether in a particular case the matter should be reported in an intelligence publication of one level or another depends on the impact the event is apt to have on the foreign country, and then on the US.

A change of government holds the potentiality for effecting many changes within a country and altering its relations with the outside world. Consequently either orderly or abrupt changes of government in even the smallest countries are normally dealt with, and analyzed, in intelligence publications. Since sudden changes could have an adverse effect on US interests, there is always an attempt to predict coups d'etat.

The Generalist Reader and Selection for Him

Apart from memoranda directed to particular consumers, current intelligence, following the main line set by its

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beginning as a report to the President, is by and large written for the generalist among policymakers. The usual Bulletin item or Weekly article does not carry factual material that would be new to people in other agencies working on the same countries or problems and normally having the same raw reports, although a concise, organized presentation and CIA's analysis may be helpful even to the experts. The target readership is principally the top policymakers, who have to come to grips with each major problem as it emerges and who in any case want to keep up with outstanding world developments.

The selection of material for publications directed to the highest officials requires especially good judgment. The readers should not be bothered unnecessarily, but neither should they be cut off from intelligence that can change their appraisals. It is axiomatic that these readers will have to be given reports on the crises and wars of the day; not to supply this information would be like giving them a newspaper without the front page. However, the top officials must also be given other "important" developments and "things they need to know." The trick comes in identifying what is important and necessary to know from the policymaker's point of view. It would be a great help to the current intelligence staff if it were aware, daily and weekly, of the immediate concerns of its policymaking readers. It has some information of this

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kind, but obviously the closer the liaison with the consumer, the more intelligence can be on target. However, even without direct knowledge of the preoccupations of the top officials, the analyst can come respectably close to the target. For one thing, the readers should be made aware of any development likely within a few weeks or months to demand US policy decisions and action. Then, leaving US involvement aside, the top officials should be informed of any development signifying a change of considerable magnitude in the strength or intentions of a US ally, an antagonist, or an important neutral.

Occasionally objection is made to the proposed publication of a report on the grounds that those officials handling the question already have the information. This argument ignores the fact that there are many high-level generalists who are not working on that particular matter, who do not have the information, but who are among OCI's principal readers. Through ignorance of the development in question, they could affect the situation adversely.

The Problem of the Press

One of the standard problems for current intelligence is posed by press coverage. Where the intelligence story is unknown to the public, there is no difficulty. Also, if the press is telling an incomplete or inadequate story,

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it is obviously desirable for OCI to set things straight. However, there is apt to be hesitation in those cases where press coverage is excellent, and let us admit that it often is. The answer usually lies in the importance of the event involved. If the Soviet Party Politburo has met and issued a pronouncement about US policy in the Middle East, the fact that the press will have the full story does not relieve OCI from writing its own piece. Probably the analyst will have some unique interpretive contribution to make, but even if this is not the case, the assumption should be that officials will be looking to see whether OCI, on its all-source basis, confirms the press, corrects it, or adds something of significance. The touchstone is whether officials need to be apprised of the development; if they do, current intelligence has an obligation to guarantee, insofar as it is able, that they will be apprised, regardless of what the press does.

Especially in dealing with Communist countries, OCI does not like to publish an analysis until it has received the full text of a statement. If the statement is of great importance, however, OCI will probably run a report based on first impressions, so as not to remain silent when the story is the talk of the town.

Relation to Policy

Although intelligence should not be written to defend or criticize policy, effective intelligence reporting calls

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for a knowledge of US interests and policies. Without such knowledge, there is a lack of criteria for the selection of developments and their meaningful interpretation. The producers of intelligence do not have to be in personal agreement with current policies, or indeed have any feeling about them at all, but their reporting needs to illuminate foreign reaction to these policies. It is essential that policymakers get a straight story of how things are working out so that they can judge whether to continue on course or take a different tack.

A Framework for Reporting

There are probably few readers of current intelligence who have not occasionally wondered how or why certain articles got into the publication. And of course it is the daily chore of the analyst, as he sifts the total inflow of traffic, to ask himself what is reportable. To an extent, we have already tried to describe the typical stuff of current intelligence, but it will do no harm to put the matter another way. Because we are providing intelligence for the use of American officials charged with US defense and foreign relations, we can do no better--in fact, can do little else--than look at world events from the viewpoint of the US. Foreign developments in conformity with American interests and policies can be regarded as "favorable." Developments opposed to US interests and policies can be considered "unfavorable" or "threats." Additionally, there are many developments that do not

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necessarily fall into either category. Some of them, however, are of obvious importance, and hence are reportable because they are likely to produce eventual effects that will matter, one way or another, to this country. The Sino-Soviet border negotiations are an example. Particular developments in these talks may have no direct repercussion on US interests, but they will probably affect the relationship between China and the USSR, which has great importance for the US.

This approach to criteria of reportability results in the following framework for all forms of current intelligence. The examples are drawn from various years.

I. Direct threats to the security of the US or its personnel abroad.

Examples:

- a. North Vietnamese intensify attacks on US bases.
- b. Soviets test ABM.
- c. New terrorist actions planned vs US personnel in Brazil.
- d. China develops thermonuclear weapons.
- e. Moscow demands Allies get out of Berlin (1958).
- f. Soviets install missiles in Cuba (1962).

II. Indirect threats to US security and threats to other US interests and policies.

- a. Japanese leftists oppose security pact with US.
- b. East Germans harass Berlin traffic.
- c. Malta gives Britain deadline for withdrawal.
- d. Violence increased along Israeli-Lebanon border.

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- e. Chile refuses compensation for takeover of US copper companies.
 - f. Challengers drop out of South Vietnam election campaign.
 - g. NATO faces open dispute on the Greek question.
- III. Favorable developments for US security, other interests, and policies.
- a. Soviet missile program suffers setback.
 - b. China moderates its foreign policy positions.
 - c. Turkish political crisis eases.
 - d. Buddhists soften their attitude toward Saigon government.
 - e. Left and right extremists are defeated in West German elections.
 - f. New Libyan government is cool to Moscow.
- IV. Other important developments.
- a. Indonesia having success in controlling inflation.
 - b. Serious friction exists among ruling group in Algeria.
 - c. Mujib faces many difficulties as he takes over in Bangladesh.
 - d. Honduran president in shaky position.
 - e. Factional fight continues in Finnish Communist party.
 - f. Croat nationalism causing concern to Belgrade.

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In selecting material for reporting under category IV, intelligence producers must guard against a natural enthusiasm for their subjects which can lead them to write about events having too slight a bearing on any US interest. If there is a connection with US interests that cannot be easily perceived, it should be clarified.

In this contentious world, a continued need by policymakers for current intelligence, as well as for other varieties of intelligence, is assured. The current intelligence staff will be playing its role in America's foreign relations with distinction if it is steadily successful in identifying important developments, in interpreting them accurately and clearly, and in communicating its findings to the policymakers rapidly, either by the printed page, by briefings, or by means yet untried.

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